

# WILDLIFE DIVERSITY NEWS

A Publication of the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program  
June, 2007



## IMPLEMENTING THE IOWA WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN

Since final federal approval last year, the Iowa Wildlife Action Plan has become a primary guiding document for the DNR. It seemed that nearly 2 ½ years of plan preparation was a huge—and often daunting—task. Now that we’re charged with actually *implementing* our Plan the real work must begin, and challenges ahead make writing the Plan seem insignificant by comparison. You see, it’s not really all that difficult to list species considered in need of help, or to say that we must double the amount of protected habitat in Iowa, or that more wildlife-based education and recreation opportunities must be provided our citizens. But now, trying to meet these and other needs or visions set forth by the Plan truly staggers the imagination.

We’re moving ahead with some aspects of the plan, at least those we can start with limited funding and staff, or those that might be accomplished by our many partner agencies and private conservation organizations—partners that are key to the hopes for ever meeting Plan visions. You’ll read elsewhere in this newsletter about DNR’s inventory and monitoring project, a long-term effort just underway that will help us better map the breadth and health of Iowa’s wildlife, which should make for more well-founded management decisions. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is working with DNR foresters and wildlife biologists to plan for better wildlife management on USDA’s Wetlands Reserve Program easement lands. The Nature Conservancy in Iowa is coordinating its future land protection plans with DNR and other conservationists, to determine how efforts can better focus upon joint needs and priority areas. County Conservation Boards continue expanding their network of nature centers and outdoor education to serve localized needs. Perhaps most importantly, the Iowa legislature is beginning to look at means of increasing funding for Iowa’s natural resources, and ways to protect funding so that it cannot be drained away for other purposes.

A problem we face is how to track Action Plan progress. While there are many conservation efforts happening statewide, without means to accurately measure progress and coordinate between various agencies, organizations, projects or individual efforts, we may not know exactly how we’re faring. There will also be periodic reporting required by Congress, if federal funding of State Wildlife Grants or other conservation programs is to continue. For that reason, we’ll be looking at opportunities to add a Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator position to DNR’s Wildlife Bureau staff. If hired, this person will head an implementation planning team, work with conservation partners, identify operational strategies, track progress, coordinate funding and prepare reports, to name but a few crucial needs.

The Iowa Wildlife Action Plan may be found in PDF format on the DNR’s website at [http://www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/files/IAcomprehensive\\_plan.html](http://www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/files/IAcomprehensive_plan.html) . It is available for every Iowan to use as a reference or planning tool to help meet the needs of Iowa’s fish and wildlife resources and their habitat. We hope you might find a way to help implement a particular vision or goal of the Plan. After all, it’s not just a DNR plan, but rather a plan for all of Iowa.

--Doug Harr  
Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator

## SE IOWA AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE CONSERVATION AREA NOW A REALITY

It is now official. Iowa has created the first in the nation amphibian and reptile conservation area! A ceremony to officially dedicate lands within southeast Iowa's Mississippi Alluvial Plain as the Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area (ARCA) was held May 1 at Horseshoe Bend (south of Wapello), within Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge. Over 30 people attended the event, and the general support for amphibian & reptile conservation amongst conservation agencies, conservation organizations, and the public has exceeded expectations.

What makes this amphibian and reptile conservation area so special is that it is the area of the state with the highest number of amphibian and reptile species, and it also contains a high percentage of Iowa's rarest amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders) & reptiles (turtles, snakes, and lizards). Over 70% (50 to 55 species) of Iowa's 72 reptiles and amphibians live in this region. An important emphasis of ARCA is to support healthy source populations of amphibians and reptiles, but it is especially focused on Iowa's declining amphibians and reptiles. This focus is tied closely to the State Wildlife Action Plan, with emphasis on rare or Greatest Conservation Need (GCN) species; for instance 48% of Iowa reptiles are GCN species.



Partners gather at SE Iowa ARCA dedication ceremony

The Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Area concept is based on the premise that sustaining healthy, stable amphibian and reptile populations requires habitat conservation at a large landscape level with connecting corridors between populations. It is important that the ARCA contains wetland habitat (ephemeral wetlands, rivers, streams, ponds, etc.), since water is critical for all amphibians and many reptile species. Another critical element is the presence of a high amount of (or high potential for) connecting corridors - both for animal dispersal and to allow genetic exchange between populations. This is especially important since amphibians and reptiles are not mobile (cannot fly like birds), and populations can become easily isolated in Iowa's industrial farmed and fragmented landscape.

The idea for ARCA is borrowed from the Bird Conservation Area (BCA) concept. But while BCA locations are based on Ecological regions, the amphibian and reptile conservation area reflects the habitat type characteristics of a particular geologic landform region, in this case the Mississippi Alluvial Plain. The lower Cedar River and lower Iowa River, in conjunction with the Mississippi River, supply the critical connecting corridors, as well as critical wetland and upland habitat needed by so many herptile (amphibian and reptile) species.

Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area is approximately 470,000 acres - with about 59,000 acres (12.5%) in public land and conservation easements and 87.5% of the land in private ownership. This area contains a variety of habitats; a good balance of Wetlands, Grasslands, Savanna, and Woodlands. These habitats provide homes to many declining Iowa species: In Rivers & Marshes – Mudpuppy, Central Newt, Blanding's Turtle, Cricket Frog, & Copperbelly Watersnake; representative Grassland species include Ornate Box Turtle, Bullsnake, Six-lined Racerunner, and Massasauga; Savanna & Woodland representative species – Western Worm Snake, Prairie Kingsnake, Timber Rattlesnake, and probably Five-lined Skink.

The Southeast Iowa ARCA is the result of state, federal, and county agencies, as well as private organizations and citizens, cooperating together to emphasize the importance of amphibian and reptile habitat. Partners include the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, County Conservation Boards, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and private landowners. According to Bill Ohde, DNR wildlife biologist and local area manager, “This unified effort represents a partnership that is an excellent example of how the human community can better conserve all natural resources in this unique landscape,”

--Bruce Ehresman  
*Wildlife Diversity Program Biologist*

## REPORTING BALD EAGLE NESTS AND COLONIAL WATERBIRD ROOKERIES

The wildlife diversity program has a couple of new features on its website! Every year starting in February and continuing throughout the summer the wildlife diversity program receives numerous reports from across the state of eagle nests and colonial waterbird rookeries. This information is always welcome as it helps our small staff keep a handle on the status of these important resources. To make it easier for folks to report their sightings as well as easier for us to get the pertinent information we need on these nesting sites, we have developed a standardized form for reporting that can be downloaded from our website.



So what kind of information is needed? For both eagle nests and colonial waterbird rookeries it is important to get accurate and precise location information in the form of UTM coordinates or at least Township, Range, Section and Quarter-section. There are instructions included on the website for an interactive mapping site that makes it easy to get UTM coordinates for a site. Other useful information is the species of tree being used, whether that tree is alive or dead and how many feet up in the tree the nest (or nests) are located. These data give suggest species preferences which can help in conservation efforts.

The most crucial piece of information next to location is the status of the nest or rookery. For bald eagle nests we need a date when the observation took place, an assessment of whether the nest is active or not and later in the nesting season an estimate of the number of young present and then fledged from the nest (Figure 1). As you notice in figure 1 it is just as important for us to know if the nest has become inactive.

Date: _____ Eggs: _____ Young: _____ Fledglings: _____ Check that which best defines the nest's status: <input type="checkbox"/> Active and Incubating <input type="checkbox"/> Nest used by other bird _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Eagle or eagles present with no nest maintenance/construction <input type="checkbox"/> Nest Inactive <input type="checkbox"/> Nest Gone <input type="checkbox"/> Nest Blew Down <input type="checkbox"/> Nest Tree Gone
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Figure 1. Example of part of the Bald Eagle Nest reporting form

For Colonial Waterbirds (including Herons, Egrets, Cormorants, and Night-herons) the date of the observation is important as well as a total count of nests in the rookery and then a count of how many of those nests are active. An estimate of a total number of young produced by the rookery is also requested. In addition, we ask for an assessment of the human activity within a ¼ mile of the rookery.

So, if you'd like to report an observation of a bald eagle nest or colonial waterbird rookery please visit our website at <http://www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/diversity/index.html>. There you will find links to pages where you can download a datasheet and get further instructions.

If you're interested in receiving some training and becoming an official monitor of a raptor and colonial waterbird nest site please follow the link on our webpage to the Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program and look at the schedule of bird nest monitoring workshops. For more information on any of these opportunities, feel free to contact me at 515-432-2823 or [stephanie.shepherd@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:stephanie.shepherd@dnr.state.ia.us).

*--Stephanie Shepherd  
Natural Resources Technician*

## **MULTIPLE SPECIES INVENTORY AND MONITORING PROGRAM**

During 2006, we had 4 summer temporary technicians (or Natural Resource Aides) working on 14 properties and we documented over 300 species. We are still in the process of double checking and analyzing this data.

Yes, it is spring again and that means our new summer Natural Resource Aides are out collecting information on birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fish, dragonflies, butterflies, mussels, terrestrial snails, and their habitats. As of May, we have not started all of the protocols, so technically we are only getting information on birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and butterflies, but as the summer goes on we will pick up the other taxonomic groups.

By May 18, the Wildlife Diversity Program employed 13—yes, 13—Natural Resource Aides, working on over 70 properties, both on public and private lands. These properties are in Boone, Butler, Clarke, Clay,



Dallas, Delaware, Emmet, Iowa, Johnson, Kossuth, Louisa, Lucas, Muscatine, Palo Alto, Plymouth, Polk, Scott, Story, Tama, Wayne, Winnebago, and Worth counties. Forty-two of the properties are enrolled in the Wetland Reserve Program through the NRCS, 12 of the properties are enrolled in the Landowner Incentive Program through the IDNR.

We were fortunate to have a large number of applicants for the Natural Resource Aide positions this year. Twelve of the 13 have college degrees, graduating within the last few years. The colleges these wonderful NR Aides have graduated from include Iowa State University, Michigan State University, Michigan Technological University, the University of Iowa, the University of Northern Iowa, and Wartburg College. The remaining NR Aide will be a senior at Iowa State University this fall. We have a long field season, lasting from the end of March through the end of October. More information on the program can be found at [http://www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/files/multispecies\\_inventory\\_monitoring.html](http://www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/files/multispecies_inventory_monitoring.html)

The work this year is being funded through 3 separate grants, all administered through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and all matched with Iowa Wildlife Diversity Program money generated through the sale of the REAP license plates. Thank you for your continued support of the Wildlife Diversity Program!

*--Karen Kinkead, PhD  
Monitoring & Research Biologist*



## **TEAMING WITH WILDLIFE: Update**

Since our December newsletter 41 more groups have added their names to the 151 organizations and businesses that have made a commitment to adequate natural resource funding by joining Iowa's Teaming With Wildlife Coalition. Several National Wild Turkey Federation Chapters have joined as well as Save Our Avian Resources, and the Keokuk Convention and Tourism Bureau. The common thread that ties all these groups together is a belief in the inestimable value of Iowa's natural resources. Thanks to all the coalition members!

At the beginning of February the coalition steering committee met to discuss among other things the exciting happenings in sustainable funding at the state level. At the end of February Pat Schlarbaum traveled to Washington, DC to lobby Iowa's Congressmen and Senators on the importance of their support for State Wildlife Grants, which brings in ~ \$600,000/year to Iowa but is an annual appropriation and is always in trouble of not being renewed. He also urged them support several bills being developed to address climate change issues and which may include money for wildlife conservation in the states. Our goal for the summer is to reach 200+ coalition members and to start raising the visibility for this issue.

If your organization or business is interested in joining the coalition an endorsement form for printing is included at the end of the newsletter or you can join online at <http://www.teaming.com/action/>. If you would like more information about the coalition please contact Stephanie Shepherd at 515-432-2823 or [stephanie.shepherd@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:stephanie.shepherd@dnr.state.ia.us). More information on the national coalition can be found at [www.teaming.com](http://www.teaming.com).

*--Stephanie Shepherd  
Natural Resource Technician*

## PEREGRINE FALCON AND OSPREY UPDATES

### Peregrines:

There were some downturns in Iowa's peregrine population in 2006. However there were ten territories reported and five successful sites that produced eleven young. At Leo's Bluff near Waukon Junction, IA, both of the adult falcons and their young mysteriously disappeared according to falconer, Bob Anderson. When he and Dave Kester rappelled into the eyrie, one pipped egg and fragments from three other eggs that indicated a normal hatch were discovered. However, there were no eyas falcons or defending adults. Other cliffs in that area of the river were searched on several occasions without finding either of the adult falcons. This is very strange and researchers are at a loss to explain what could have happened. Reports are encouraging this spring with a pair sited at this bluff in recent weeks.

The adult falcons at the Lansing, IA power plant moved back to the nearby cliff in 2006, most probably due to a major construction project that took place near their nestbox on stack. In past seasons, these falcons have lost their young around ten days of age to raccoons at this ledge. On 5/17/06, a large contingency of volunteers met at this cliff to initiate efforts to repel raccoons from the ledge site. However, they were too late. One set of raccoon tracks and eggshell fragments were discovered at the eyrie. This spring a cadre of volunteers assisted by Anderson relocated a nest box to a secure cliff site about 20 feet from ledge peregrines had used previously.

Another disappointment occurred in Des Moines in 2006 where an unidentified female laid eggs at American Republic Insurance bldg. onto cold concrete. Four eggs were discovered and pea gravel added under them but they did not hatch. Pea gravel is a natural substrate for nesting peregrines and allows moisture to not affect incubating eggs.

This year pair is incubating in third alcove at SE corner of American Republic Insurance bldg. Another female also has been sighted at state Capitol, but no eggs have been discovered there, either in nestbox or rain gutters.

On a brighter note Theresa Chapel with Cedar Rapids US Bank bldg. reported pair produced four young – three males and one female in 2006. This year pair hatched four young on April 30, 2007. We will band these young at 10AM May 23 at US Bank bldg. in downtown Cedar Rapids. **The public is invited.**

At MidAmerican Energy Corporate Headquarters, Davenport, Dave Sebben reported that pair produced two young in 2006. In 2007 female laid eggs away from nest box in rain gutter of bldg. Sebben discovered eggs quickly and placed eggs into a nest tray with pea gravel added. However, female recently abandoned incubation. Today male was sighted creating a scrape in substrate of nestbox. It is not out of the question for female to recycle and lay again.

At Louisa Generating Station in 2006, Jim Haack, MidAmerica Energy, reports that an unidentified female and an unidentified male, both banded, fledged two females and one male. This pair is back on site again this spring.

At Great River Bridge in Burlington local birder, Hal Geren, reported two adult and one young throughout July in 2006. This site is again active this spring.

Alliant Energy Plant, Chillicothe, Wapello County, Iowa, Judi Johnson reported seven-year-old female Z/V (produced 10 at Louisa and Chillicothe) and an unidentified male and fledged one young in 2006.

This pair is active again at this site. Male was noted to have a gold band which indicates it was a hacked or released bird.

At I-280 Bridge at Quad Cities, local birder Kelly McKay reported pair of falcons on west pier (Iowa side) of bridge. Two eggs on concrete were discovered and placed in a nest tray with pea gravel. There was no further activity reported at this site in 2006. This pair is again nesting at prepared site near center span of bridge in 2007.

At I-80 bridge in Quad Cities a pair of peregrines were defending the bridge but no eggs were discovered. Nest tray on Iowa side of bridge had not been used. This pair has been reported active this spring.

In summary there were ten territories with five successful pairs and eleven young produced in 2006. In 2007 falconer Bob Anderson reports a falcon pair at nest box he installed at ML Kapp power plant in Clinton, Iowa. This will total 12 peregrine territories in 2007. Be watching for news with dates for banding activities. *Thanks* to all partners of the peregrines.

### **Osprey:**

The cadre of volunteers and partners dedicated to establishing Osprey nesting pairs around Iowa had a good year in 2006! Six nesting pairs of Ospreys were reported and four successful nesting pairs fledged eight young. This output doubled earlier nesting totals of four nests with eight young from 2003-2005. A seventh nesting pair has been added this year with a nest discovered at Rathbun Reservoir.

- At Lake Macbride Jodeane Cancilla with **Macbride Raptor Project** and *volunteers* reported two nesting pairs and one pair was successful. Adults J7 (Hartman 2003) and K8 (Hartman 2002) fledged two young.
- At **Hartman Reserve Nature Center**, Sandy Fulcher with Black Hawk County Conservation Board staff, *volunteers*, and *Friends group* reported a wild nesting pair fledged two young. Male is H8 from 2001 release and female is unbanded.
- At Jester Park, Joe Boyles with **Polk County Conservation Board** staff and *volunteers* report a pair E1 (Macbride 2000) and E4 (Hartman 2000) fledged two young.

The three sites above did not release birds in 2006. However a total of ten Ospreys came to Iowa from Minnesota and fifteen more were relocated from Wisconsin at sites that follow:

- At Don Williams Lake, Emily Herring with **Boone County Conservation Board** and *volunteers* reported a wild nesting pair fledged two young. However, one young was discovered dead at nest site. Necropsy revealed that it was not West Nile virus. Five additional Ospreys were relocated from Minnesota.
- At Wickiup Hill, Chuck Ungs with **Linn County Conservation Board** staff and *volunteers* released five additional Ospreys from Wisconsin. A wild nesting pair appeared to be incubating but no chicks hatched.
- At Clear Lake **Iowa Regular Baptist Camp** staff and *volunteers* released five additional Ospreys that were relocated from Minnesota. However, two young did not survive release process.
- At Red Rock Reservoir Marla Mertz with **Marion Co. Conservation Board**, Larry Zirklebach with **DNR Parks personnel**, John Mertz and Jason Sandholtz with **DNR Law Enforcement**, **US Army Corps of Engineers** and *volunteers* released five Ospreys from Wisconsin.
- A new site was established at White Rock Conservancy where five Wisconsin Ospreys were hacked by **Saving Our Avian Resource** director Kay Neumann and *volunteers*. Three rehabbed birds from The Raptor Center, St. Paul MN. were also released.

- In July 2007 a ninth site will be included in Osprey release sites at Spirit Lake coordinated by Barb Tagami with **Dickinson County Conservation Board**, Tim Waltz with **DNR Wildlife Bureau** and *volunteers*. This release will be in conjunction with Osprey efforts with North Heron Lake Game Producers Association in Minnesota, 25 miles north of Spirit Lake. That group is rejuvenating their Osprey releases after earlier efforts in late 1990s produced a successful nesting pair at Spirit Lake in 2003. These two sites will each receive five Ospreys from Minnesota area near Brainerd.

Since 1997, 157 Ospreys have been released at eight sites around Iowa, which include Macbride Raptor Project in Johnson Co., Hartman Reserve Nature Center in Black Hawk Co., Jester Park in Polk Co., Don Williams Lake in Boone Co., Clear Lake in Cerro Gordo Co., Wickiup Hill in Linn Co., Red Rock in Marion Co., and White Rock Conservancy in Greene Co. Sixteen wild Ospreys have been produced in Iowa from eight nesting pairs. All Iowa Ospreys have a purple band with letters and numbers for ease in identification and a silver US Fish and Wildlife Service on right leg. However, all wild-produced Iowa Ospreys have a green USFWS band on right leg. Both purple and green bands are unique to Iowa's Ospreys. It's fun watching Ospreys and very helpful if band numbers/letters can be reported to this office or one of our partners. Thanks to all friends, partners and volunteers dedicated to providing Ospreys clean waters in which to live!

--Pat Schlarbaum  
Natural Resource Technician

## WATCHABLE WILDLIFE EVENTS CALENDAR

- ***Pelican Festival*** at Jester Park, Saylorville Lake, Johnston: Sept. 9, 2007. Contact (email) [pccb\\_info@co.polk.ia.us](mailto:pccb_info@co.polk.ia.us) .
- ***Midwest Birding Symposium*** at Quad Cities: Sept 13-16, 2007. Information available at [http://www.visitquadcities.com/for\\_mbs/midwest\\_birding.html](http://www.visitquadcities.com/for_mbs/midwest_birding.html) .
- ***HawkWatch*** at Effigy Mounds National Monument, McGregor: Oct. 6-7, 2007. Contact (email) [pat.schlarbaum@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:pat.schlarbaum@dnr.state.ia.us)
- ***Rivers & Bluffs Birding Festival*** at Lansing: Friday, November 10-12. Contact (email) [Ric.Zarwell@mchsi.com](mailto:Ric.Zarwell@mchsi.com)



**The Wildlife Diversity Team is:**

***Doug Harr***, Program Coordinator for administration, planning & funding

***Bruce Ehresman***, Program Biologist for projects & technical guidance

***Karen Kinkead***, PhD, Monitoring and Research Biologist

***Pat Schlarbaum***, Program Technician for species restoration & public events

***Stephanie Shepherd***, Program Technician for data management, funding support & field research

***Ron Moore***, AmeriCorps Wildlife Specialist



*(Left to right) Pat Schlarbaum, Karen Kinkead,  
Doug Harr, Bruce Ehresman, Stephanie Shepherd  
(not pictured—Ron Moore)*

**With Assistance From:**

***Ron Andrews***, Wildlife Biologist (Trumpeter Swans & furbearers)

***Dave Hoffman***, Natural Resources Technician (Trumpeter Swans & furbearers)

Federal regulations prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex or disability. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility, as described above, or if you desire information, please write to Director, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, 900 East Grand Ave., Des Moines, IA 50319-0034.





## Statement of Endorsement



**TEAMING WITH WILDLIFE**  
*a natural investment*

On behalf of the \_\_\_\_\_, I hereby endorse **Teaming with Wildlife**. Our group is delighted to join the National Coalition and support funding dedicated to fish and wildlife conservation, outdoor recreation and conservation education in every state. **Teaming with Wildlife** is our natural investment in a future teeming with wildlife!

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

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**Please Print:**

☐ Organization or ☐ Business

Signers Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Office Held: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to add additional contacts to our lists?

Name/Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

How many members and/or employees does your organization/business represent? \_\_\_\_\_

If you are a company, what kind (i.e. retailer, manufacturer, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_

If you are a state chapter should you be listed under the national organization? \_\_\_\_\_

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Personal letters of support are appreciated and will be documented as testimony of the growing support for Teaming with Wildlife. Please mail with information about your group to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Diversity Program, Boone Wildlife Research Station, 1436 255<sup>th</sup> St. Boone, IA 50036. 515-432-2823x102 [doug.harr@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:doug.harr@dnr.state.ia.us)

For information on the Teaming with Wildlife Coalition and how you can help, please visit <http://www.teaming.com/>